

Reading Mini-Assessment Grade 5
LA.5.2.2.1 Form A

Queen Bess



The United States Postal Service honored aviator Bessie Coleman on a 1995 32 cent commemorative postage stamp.

Today, at any given time, there are thousands of planes in the sky. Air travel is so common that we almost never stop to think about it. However, this wasn't always the case. Over the years many brave people have risked their lives to make the dream of flying come true.

You probably know that the Wright Brothers built the first airplane that actually flew. Charles Lindbergh was the first man to fly across the Atlantic Ocean. Amelia Earhart was the first woman to fly across both the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans.

Those people are American heroes. But there is another pioneer in flying. She is not as well known, but her story is also very important. Her name is Bessie Coleman, and she was the first African-American pilot.

Bessie Coleman was born in Atlanta, Texas, in 1892. She had a hard childhood. Her parents were poor. They did not earn much money working in the fields. Bessie loved school, especially mathematics, but she could not attend school as often as she wished. As one of 13 children, Bessie often had to take care of her younger brothers and sisters. And during the cotton-picking season, the local school closed so that children could help their parents work in the fields. Still, Bessie did very well in her classes. She vowed that one day she would go to college.

That dream came true in 1910 when Bessie enrolled at a local college. Unfortunately, after less than a year, she ran out of money and had to go back to work. Bessie then moved to Chicago where her brother John was living.

John had been a soldier in France during World War I. One day, he mentioned to Bessie that in France there were women pilots.

"That's it!" Bessie cried excitedly. "You just called it for me!"

In that instant Bessie decided what she was going to do with her life. She always felt she would be somebody special. Now she knew why. She was going to be the first African-American woman pilot.

Bessie Coleman faced many challenges. First she had to find someone who would teach her how to fly. She applied to one flying school after another, but they all refused to admit her. Finally, Bessie turned for help to Robert S. Abbott, the editor of the *Defender*, one of Chicago's African-American newspapers.

When Abbott suggested that Bessie go to France, she immediately began to learn French. Abbott saw how determined Bessie was to become a pilot, and he made up his mind to assist her. He helped Bessie find a flying school in France. He even gave her the money to attend. That was all the help Bessie needed to follow her dream.



Bessie Coleman—dressed for flying—around the time she was in France. She is wearing the preferred clothing of pilots (both men and women), including a long, comfortable flying coat that was both warm and durable to protect her from the cold and wind.

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In France Bessie learned how to fly. In those days pilots were exposed to the open air. The plane's engines made a deafening noise, and the wind howled fiercely. Pilots had to wear scarves and leather gloves to keep from freezing. But Bessie loved flying. She once said, "You have never lived until you have flown."

On June 15, 1921, after only seven months in flight school, Bessie received her pilot's license. She became the first African-American woman pilot in history.

When Bessie returned to the United States in 1921, she found herself surrounded by reporters. They were anxious to write her story. Bessie had suddenly become famous! But she still faced a serious problem—how to earn a living as a pilot. Bessie decided to work as a stunt pilot—a pilot who entertains audiences by performing dangerous tricks in a plane.

In October 1922 Bessie put on her first show at an airfield in Chicago. The excited crowd watched as Bessie did thrilling loops and "figure-eights." She sometimes flew her plane so low that it nearly touched the ground. Before long Bessie was known as "Queen Bess." She soon became one of the most famous pilots in the world.

But Bessie Coleman still had one more dream. It was to start her own flying school. She hoped to train other young African-Americans who wanted to become pilots. To raise money for the school, Bessie performed many air shows. She gave lectures in schools around the country. She also encouraged young people to think about careers in aviation.

On April 28, 1926, Bessie went to Jacksonville, Florida, to perform in an air show. The day before the show at Paxton Field in Jacksonville, she asked a young pilot to take her up in his plane. She wanted to study the field and prepare for the show.

Bessie was not wearing her seat belt because she wanted to lean out of the plane to look down at the field. At 3,500 feet the plane suddenly started to fall. After a terrifying few seconds, it flipped over. Bessie was thrown from the plane. She plunged more than 500 feet to her death.

On May 5, 1926, more than 10,000 people attended Bessie Coleman's funeral in Chicago. Among them were many children who had heard Bessie speak at their schools.

In 1977, more than 50 years after Bessie's death, a group of African-American women pilots established the Bessie Coleman Aviators Club. The club is open to women pilots of all races.

Every year on April 28, the date on which Bessie Coleman died, the members of the club fly over the cemetery where Bessie is buried. They drop flowers on her grave. The pilots are showing their respect for "Queen Bess," a woman who encouraged so many others to follow their dreams.

The "Jenny" Biplane



Bessie Coleman and many other stunt pilots of her time performed their *stunts* (daring tricks) in a Curtiss JN-4 biplane, also known as a "Jenny," similar to the one pictured above. The stunt pilots traveled to thousands of U. S. towns thrilling audiences with their exhibitions of acrobatics in the air.

<p style="text-align: center;">Reading Mini-Assessment Grade 5 LA.5.2.2.1 Form A</p>
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Name _____ **Date** _____

Directions: Read the passage and choose the correct answer.

1. The photographs are important to the passage because they
 - A. prove to readers that flying was dangerous.
 - B. explain to readers why stunt flying thrilled audiences.
 - C. suggest to readers that pilots needed better equipment.
 - D. show readers visual examples of information in the passage.

2. What is the purpose of the caption under the photograph at the bottom of page 1?
 - A. to tell readers when Bessie Coleman went to France.
 - B. to give reasons why pilots wore comfortable coats.
 - C. to explain why men and women wore different flying clothes.
 - D. to give readers details about the clothes Bessie Coleman is wearing.

3. The purpose of the photograph on page 2 is to show the reader
 - A. what stunt planes looked like.
 - B. why the planes were cold and noisy.
 - C. which stunt pilots flew planes.
 - D. how pilots performed stunts in their planes.

4. The purpose of the caption in italics at the beginning of the passage is to
 - A. inform readers Bessie Coleman was a famous person.
 - B. explain why a postage stamp was made to honor Bessie Coleman.
 - C. tell readers a postage stamp was made in honor of Bessie Coleman.
 - D. prove Bessie Coleman deserved a postage stamp made in her honor.

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ANSWER KEY

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Item #	Answer
1.	D
2.	D
3.	A
4.	C